

December 17, 2013
International Day to End Violence against Sex Workers



On this December 17, 2013 we are remembering our colleagues who have gone missing and have been murdered. Sex workers continue to experience violence from: the police, the courts, through our oppressive and dangerous prostitution laws, and at the hands of the prohibitionist seeking to 'save' us from ourselves.

'Rescue' as Violence

"Trafficked persons refers to the transportation and compulsion of an individual into any form of labour through use of force, threats of force, fraud, or coercion or debt bondage" (Ditmore, 2009, see also UN¹). The police and prohibitionists alter this definition of trafficking to include anyone engaged in sex work as an occupation. This deliberate conflation has led many Canadians to equate sex work with the word 'trafficking'. All sex workers are deemed to be domestically trafficked. The sex workers most greatly impacted by this are sex workers who are Asian, Indigenous and those from other ethnic groups. Migrant sex workers are also overwhelmingly targeted and framed as trafficked by the media, police and prohibitionists. Indeed, owing to many sensationalist news stories, and lurid docudramas the word "trafficking" evokes images of women and children forced into servitude in the popular imagination.

A sex worker who interacts with clients outdoors, places their ad in the paper or on the Internet, answers their own phone, and makes their own decisions about which clients to see, is deemed to be so victimized by sex work that they can't even realize that they are being abused. We are spoken about as lacking human agency to make our own choices, which denies us the right to even speak in our own defence. By constructing us this way, they can conveniently force us into 'rescue'. This is a way to deny us our voices.

In Canada, vice raids & sweeps occur. Our colleagues are arrested, handcuffed, photographed, fingerprinted, and thrown in jail. The only way out, without a criminal record, is to agree to forced 're-education' at one of the "exit" programs. These programs don't let sex workers speak for themselves, and construct us all as victims in need of their so called help. In some other countries, including India, sex workers have broken out and escaped from rescue camps (Hadaspar, India. 21 & 42 sex workers respectively in two separate incidents).

The reframing of sex workers' own experiences and lives to suit agendas, and the continued conflation of sex work with trafficking, creates a world where we are not free to travel, where we are not free to be active agents in our own lives and work and where those who seek to 'rescue' us are actually perpetrators of violence against us.

Links:

¹UN definition of trafficking:

<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/faqs.html>

Sex Trade Not Traffic:

<http://www.nationmultimedia.com/life/Sex-trade-not-traffic-30177322.html>

Bad Rehab You Tube Video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GM0r7N1rIMI>

Health and human rights advocates denounce Gates Foundation's support of raids on sex workers:

<http://www.nswp.org/resource/health-and-human-rights-advocates-denounce-gates-foundations-support-raids-sex-workers>

The Use of Raids to Fight Trafficking in Persons:

<http://www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/swp-2009-raids-and-trafficking-report.pdf>

Collateral Damage:

http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/shared/shared/mainsite/microsites/IDM/workshops/ensuring_protection_070909/collateral_damage_gaatw_2007.pdf